

IDAHO HISTORY

“Long, long ago when my great-great grandfather was just a pup, Idaho was known only as a part of the “Far West” and was inhabited solely by Native Americans. Ancestors of the Kootenai, Coeur d’Alene, Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes populated the state. Each band was unique. They lived in teepees or wickiups or caves. Some ate deer and elk; others picked berries and dug camas roots. All were rich with legend and ceremony and tradition.

“It is believed that the first white men entered Idaho when the Great Expedition, under the direction of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Captain William Clark, crossed the Lemhi Pass on August 12, 1805. For six weeks, they lived with a Nez Perce Indian Tribe near Kamiah, Idaho. In their journals, the explorers recorded their route through the state, encounters with the treacherous Snake River, newly discovered natural vegetation, hunting success stories, and observations of the lifestyles of the men, women and children they encountered.

“Soon after the initial exploration by Lewis and Clark, entrepreneurs began to come. Forts and trading posts were established, selling supplies in exchange for furs and bringing natives and newcomers together. Missionaries and Jesuit Priests followed, building churches and schools with the hope of converting Indians to Christianity and teaching them to speak English. The Jesuit Coeur d’Alene Mission of the Sacred Heart, or Cataldo Mission, was built in 1842. The church stands today near Desmet, Idaho.

“As more people emigrated from east to west, their hand carts and covered wagons began to wear ruts in the ground, forming a road through Idaho which became known as the Oregon Trail. When Gold was discovered in California in 1849, over 20,000 people traveled through our state on their way to seek wealth. Mormons established their headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah and began branching out to Southern Idaho, establishing farms and churches and schools and small businesses. And then Gold was discovered in Idaho! And then silver! And with this discovery came miners and businesses to support the miners. Mostly men, but some women and children, sought their fortunes with shallow pans and sluices and picks. Others made money by providing food and supplies. It was from the demands of miners that Idaho’s beef and lamb industries gained a market. Idaho was too arid for many farms, so most of the state was open grazing range. Thousands of cattle and millions of sheep fed on the deserts, mountain slopes and river basins of the state. At one time, the Wood River Train Station, near Sun Valley, Idaho, shipped more lambs to market annually than any other depot in the world.

“During the second half of the nineteenth century, Idaho acquired newspapers and telegraphs and electric lights. The Indian wars occurred. A capitol building was constructed. A system of government was formed. Labor and industry groups organized. A university was established. Women gained the right to vote. Railroads were laid across the land. Idaho became a territory, and then, on July 3, 1890, became the 43rd state in the Union.